



Carlyle House

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George II: John Carlyle's King

By Henry Desmarais

When George II became the British monarch in June 1727, after the death of his father, George I or George Ludwig, John Carlyle was only 7 years old. George II would reign until October 1760 and he would play important roles in such events of concern to John Carlyle as the Jacobite rebellion in 1745, during which Carlisle was occupied, and the Seven Years War, or what is also known as the French and Indian War. And it would have been King George II that General Braddock toasted during his 1755 stay in the Carlyle House.

Andrew C. Thompson's 296-page biography of George II, published in 2011, is the focus of this article. Thompson is Fellow and College Lecturer in History at Queens' College, Cambridge. His book is part of the Yale English Monarchs Series. Overall, it is a well-written and interesting account, though the story includes far too many Georges, Fredericks and Sophias to suit me, as well as an astonishing array of scheming ministers and politicians, both Whigs and Tories.

George II's story begins with his birth in Germany on November 10, 1683 (according to the Gregorian calendar, which had not yet been adopted in Britain). George II's paternal grandmother, Sophia of the Palatinate, was a Protestant Stuart, which is how George and his father came to inherit the British throne when the prior monarch, Anne, died childless. Many other Stuarts ostensibly in line for the British throne were Catholic and therefore barred from succession by the Act of Settlement. George's paternal grandfather, Ernst August, was Elector of Hanover, which is how George and his father also ended up wearing two hats, one as King of England, Scotland and Ireland, and another as Elector of Hanover, which was German territory and part of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus George II was simultaneously the British monarch and a sovereign

prince on the European continent.

Thompson makes it clear that family life among the British royals was far from harmonious or easy. As Prince of Wales, George II clashed politically with his father and, at one point, was even barred from seeing his own children. George II was later repaid when his own son, Frederick, the Prince of Wales, essentially became the center of the political opposition, and Frederick was not allowed to come and see his own dying mother. Frederick would initiate a smear campaign against his younger brother, William, Duke of Cumberland. George II would see his daughters married off to various royal and princely houses in the hopes of fostering alliances, including Denmark, the United Provinces (the Netherlands), and the German state of Hessen-Kassel, from whence came Hessian troops. But then he would have to tread lightly in his dealings with them for fear of compromising their standing in their respective lands. Late in life, George II would bemoan his not having been as attentive a father as he should have when his children were young but Thompson gives many examples of his care for them later in life.

Thompson also makes it clear that mistresses were an accepted part of royal governance, hardly the stuff that would survive a modern media onslaught.

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CARLYLE HOUSE

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**George II, Continued.**

George II apparently even kept his wife, Caroline of Ansbach, informed about the gifts he was buying his mistresses, what they were doing, etc. Thompson tells us that in 1737 the dying Queen Caroline urged George II to remarry but that the king tearfully responded “non, j’aurai des maîtresses” [no, I shall have mistresses], to which Caroline is said to have replied “ah mon Dieu! Cela n’empêche pas” [Oh my God, that (getting re-married) doesn’t prevent it (having mistresses)]. After Caroline’s death, British ministers regularly used the King’s mistress, Amelie Sophie Marianne von Wallmoden, also known as Lady Yarmouth, as a conduit to influence the King. Countess Wallmoden, a married woman, had come over from Hanover and subsequently became a naturalized British citizen.

Thompson tells us that George II initially spoke French, was later taught German and English, and was also credited with speaking Italian. The biography does not indicate that fluency in English was much of a problem during George’s time on the British throne, and describes only one instance when his accent made him difficult to understand; one nobleman mistakenly thought that an angry George had challenged him to a duel.

George is acknowledged as having been heroic on the battlefield on two specific occasions. The first was in a 1708 battle against the French at Oudenarde, during the War of the Spanish Succession, a war prompted by the fact that Charles II of Spain had died childless. During this battle, a horse was shot out from under George and an officer standing beside him was killed. The second time was in 1743 at Dettingen in a battle against the French during the War of the Austrian Succession. In this instance, George II was on the side of those wanting to uphold the Pragmatic Sanction in favor of Maria Theresa, a Protestant, as Empress of Austria. And Dettingen was the last time a British monarch took personal command of troops.

Thompson acknowledges that George II definitely had a “sharp tongue and a strong temper.” He loved deer hunting and playing cards. Since he spent considerable time in Hanover, he was also often

accused of putting Hanover (and German) interests first, and his absences also caused much popular discontent in Britain. However, Thompson argues that these absences also facilitated the development of cabinet government, as the king’s British ministers grew accustomed to getting their own way. Nonetheless, Thompson assures us that George II was still central with respect to both foreign affairs and patronage, especially in military and ecclesiastical spheres and in peerage promotions. In foreign affairs, he was a skillful politician, apparently aided by his extensive knowledge of genealogy (that is, who was related to whom and how that knowledge could be turned to one’s advantage). Nevertheless, George II did not always get his way. For example, he was forced to part with a minister he liked and to accept those he didn’t, including William Pitt. Also, being a constitutional monarch in Britain was far different than being a more autocratic Elector of Hanover. What is not disputed is that George II considered himself and was viewed by others as the protector of Protestant interests wherever he was.

Thompson also gives us lots of entertaining tidbits in recounting the life of George II. For example, the royal bed had to travel with the king, an interesting logistical challenge in the 18th century. Thompson also discusses rumping, the practice of turning one’s back on someone, a weapon that George II evidently was not shy about using against diplomats. His grandson, George III, would later do the same when Thomas Jefferson was presented at court. And when George II was absent from Hanover, his courtiers there would gather once a week, place his picture on a chair, and bow to it. On a less curious note, George Frideric Handel composed many pieces for the royal family, including music for George II’s coronation and a Te Deum in honor of the Dettingen battle. And while George II is typically credited with standing during the Hallelujah chorus of Handel’s Messiah, thereby beginning the custom, Thompson notes that there is no real evidence for his standing or even his attending a performance of this oratorio. Finally, Thompson tells us that the State of Georgia is named after George II.

Two events during the reign of George II stand out as



having particular significance in the life of John Carlyle. The first of these was a 1745 uprising through which the Catholic Stuarts hoped to overthrow George II. During the uprising, forces led by Charles Edward, eldest grandson of James II, also known as Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Young Pretender, occupied Carlisle, England for a time in late December 1745. The uprising he led was ultimately unsuccessful, and one of George II's sons, Lord Cumberland, played a key role in its suppression, thereby earning the moniker, the Butcher. In April 1746, at Culloden, Jacobite forces were decimated by Cumberland's artillery, the wounded were left to die, and no quarter was given. As we know, John Carlyle was particularly concerned about the Young Pretender's depredations. In a February 20, 1746 letter, he tells his brother George Carlyle that he has "been for Some time Uneasey on Yr & my mothers [Accounts] for fear of this Disturber, the Young Chevalier...Pray miss no Opportunity of Letting Me heare from you About it..."

The second event is the Seven Years War. Thompson argues that the August 1756 invasion of Saxony by George II's nephew and newfound ally, Frederick II of Prussia, was the trigger for the Seven Years War. Of course, hostilities had already occurred in the British Colonies, including those related to George Washington's forays into English territory and General Edward Braddock's fateful campaign. It appears that George II was not particularly concerned about what was going on in North America. Instead, he was focused on the European theater, especially the welfare of his Hanoverian territory, which was overrun by the French during the course of the war. Thompson devotes considerable attention to these matters. Of course, in the end, the British triumphed over the French and their allies.

Overall, Thompson's biography is a sympathetic treatment of George II. It does devote considerable space to the complicated infighting among George II's many ministers, other politicians and members of the royal family. Thus, the book would probably warrant a second reading in order to absorb all the

nuances, especially if, like me, you are not a student of English history.

George II's death in 1760 occurred while he was on a close stool, or commode, probably not unlike the one in the master bedchamber of the Carlyle House today. The post-mortem indicated that one of the ventricles in the King's heart had ruptured. In a touching tribute to his wife, George had requested removal of one side of his coffin and one side of hers so that their remains could mingle. George II's death meant that his grandson heir, George III, now assumed the dual roles of British monarch and Elector of Hanover; George II's original successor, his son, Frederick, had died in 1751. George III gets his own attention in the *Yale Monarchs Series* in an acclaimed biography by Jeremy Black, a book for another day. If anyone in the Carlyle House family would like to borrow my copy of George II's biography, I would be happy to oblige. I think you would find it worth your time.

Sources

- Andrew C. Thompson, *George II: King and Elector*, Yale University Press, 2011.
- James D. Munson, *Col. John Carlyle, Gent., A True Account of the Man and His House*, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, 1986.
- George II of Great Britain, Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_II_of_Great_Britain, accessed October 9, 2012.